

Pump Up Your Heart Health

(NAPS)—One in three adults in the United States—80 million people—has some form of heart disease, stroke or other cardiovascular condition, but you can reduce your risk of these disorders.

Researchers with the Prevention Research Centers (PRC) Program, a nationwide network of 37 academic research partners funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to find ways to keep people healthy, offer the following tips.

“Eat high-quality carbohydrates and fats,” advises Tom Keyserling, M.D., M.P.H., researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill PRC. Dr. Keyserling says the latest public health research indicates that for heart health, people should pay attention to the quality, not just the quantity, of fats and carbohydrates they eat. “High-quality carbs include whole grains instead of refined grains, whole wheat bread instead of white bread, brown rice instead of white rice and, in general, non-starchy fruits and vegetables, such as citrus and broccoli,” he says. “And choose nuts, fish, and vegetable oils for their high-quality polyunsaturated fat.” He is researching how well the new dietary findings work to improve heart health.

“One key element of heart health is physical activity, which helps people control their weight and blood pressure,” says Tracy Battaglia, M.D., M.P.H., of the Boston University PRC. “High blood pressure is a critical risk factor for cardiovascular disease. It’s important to keep your blood pressure less than 140/90, and less than 120/80 is considered normal.” She is investigating strategies to connect public housing residents, who often have insufficient health insurance, with health care services.

Reducing the amount of salt you eat can help reduce blood pressure, adds Alwyn Cohall, M.D., of the Columbia University PRC. “It’s not so much what you add to your food with the saltshaker, but what’s



Being active can reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

already in your food,” he says. “Processed food is the leading culprit. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.” Dr. Cohall is researching strategies for lowering blood pressure in New York’s Harlem community, which is largely African American—a population more likely to have high blood pressure than the white population.

Dr. Cohall also recommends not smoking, limiting alcohol, and taking medications as prescribed to control blood pressure. “High blood pressure may have no symptoms,” he says. “The unfortunate first warning sign may be stroke or heart attack. Don’t wait for symptoms before taking action to protect your heart.”

The PRC researchers’ recommendations are in line with Million Hearts™, an initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services to prevent a million heart attacks and strokes by 2017 through improvements in clinical and community prevention. Clinical prevention focuses on the “ABCS”:

- A — Appropriate Aspirin Therapy
- B — Blood Pressure Control
- C — Cholesterol Management
- S — Smoking Cessation.

Community prevention focuses on reducing salt and trans fats in Americans’ diets and preventing tobacco use. Learn more at www.millionhearts.hhs.gov.

For more information about CDC’s Prevention Research Centers Program, visit www.cdc.gov/prc.